

Notification of Infectious Diseases

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In a circular letter issued by the Health Department of Milwaukee, attention is called to the fact that after August 1st, 1905, Chapter 192 of the laws of Wisconsin, 1905, entitled "An Act Prescribing the Duties of Physicians and Others Relative to Infectious Diseases," will be strictly enforced.

In reviewing this act, it will be noticed that practically all of the communicable diseases are hereafter to be reported to the local health boards. The new list embraces typhoid fever, tuberculosis, erysipelas, chicken pox, whooping cough, plague, yellow fever and cerebro-spinal-meningitis, all diseases which were heretofore not included.

The necessity of reporting chicken pox rests not so much upon the importance of the disease per se as upon the liability of a mistake in diagnosis between chicken pox and a light form of variola.

The records of the local health department show that this has occurred repeatedly during the past two years, and in a few instances has been the direct cause of an extended outbreak of smallpox in certain localities. The same conditions apply to r6theln and measles. Typhoid fever is another disease that requires close observation by the health authorities. In many instances epidemics of this disease have been cut short by prompt action in locating and removing the cause; but unless all cases are regularly reported by physicians, health boards will be greatly handicapped in their efforts in combating this disease. To illustrate a case in point: Some weeks ago Milwaukee's water supply showed unmistakable signs of pollution, incidentally accompanied by a slight increase in the number of reported cases of typhoid fever. The department called attention to this fact through the daily press with the result that within the next few days a great many cases were reported; this seemed, to all intents, the beginning of a typhoid fever epidemic,

but during the following week the number of cases again fell to normal. This incident demonstrated that physicians were not reporting their cases promptly, but were roused to do so only through the medium of the press, thus probably including all cases that came to their notice during the previous two or three weeks. Thus there is clearly demonstrated a need for the co-operation [sic] of all physicians, so that local health boards may improve upon existing conditions and guard against serious outbreaks of any of the preventable diseases.

The propriety of including tuberculosis in the list of reportable diseases cannot now, nor will it ever again, be seriously questioned. The opposition it met with some years ago was based on a mistaken conception of the correct relationship of health authorities to the medical profession, and the public at large. The object in view including tuberculosis in the list is to prevent its extension and to promote the recoveries of those already stricken.

Tuberculosis is a dangerous, communicable disease, but fortunately, both preventable and curable. With our present knowledge of its mode of propagation and the necessary factors conducive to its spread, it becomes the imperative duty of every physician, when called upon to attend a case, to immediately inform both patient and relatives of the true condition, so that proper precautionary measures may be adopted to guard against the infection of other members of the family. As long as the consumptive remains in ignorance of his actual condition, he will be a continual source of danger to himself as well as to the rest of the community.

We sincerely hope that the physicians of this state will recognize the importance of this measure, and will give their hearty co-operation [sic] in enforcing its provisions.